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As the facilitator of our tech study group I was unsure of what to expect in terms of how the group would function. I could see, coming, in that I would be faced with a variety of technology ability levels, and that concerned me a bit due to the fact that the promise of differentiation was an appeal to many people and an item that drew many people to the group. That said, once we began our study, I was amazed with what my colleagues brought to the table in every regard.

As a learner, I walked away with many helpful ideas and strategies. First, since this group was inter-departmental, I was able to see how one tech product might work well in Spanish classes, but not so effectively in science rooms. The teachers in the group showed me the nuances of their content areas, which I had not previously known, which then allowed me to better see how technology integration must be a fit with not only the teacher’s preferences but the demands of the content. Additionally, I enjoyed learning how my colleagues think about and plan their courses. Many of them think drastically differently than I do, and being privy to that thought process helped me to see the myriad of ways technology can be helpful in delivering content and in assessing student learning.

As alluded to before, the interaction I had with my colleagues was invaluable. I was refreshed to see that I still had things to learn, and that I could learn them from people I had barely known before this opportunity. I don’t often work directly with our Spanish or science teachers, but having so many of them in the group enlightened me to the notions of how they worked and thought. More importantly, though, their methodologies challenged my own thinking, and that has assisted me in revamping individual lessons and units that I will re-invent for next fall. Having that mirror held up to my practice was important and reinvigorating.

Working with the study group helped me at two levels. One level was simply at the personal and classroom level. I know better now what I’d like to improve upon for next fall. I have a long list of lessons that need tweaking and progressions that could implement some technological steps better. Those changes will certainly lead to student achievement improvements. Additionally, I was able to monitor my own skills as a leader and mentor. As my own children grow older, I plan on entering the realm of administration, and this short stint as a more formal mentor helped shape my “administrative chops.” I see how much teaching must go into those positions, and I was glad to have the opportunity to mentor, guide, and lead colleagues while earning their respect along the way. While that benefit had little to do with technology in the classroom, the experience was invaluable.

This study group has both met and created new goals for me. My professional goals this year centered around technology integration into my English classroom and my goals of moving that toward a completely “flipped” classroom. There were always lessons and scaffolding steps I had that maintained some pedagogical holes. Some of the tools we worked with in this group will fill those steps in future implementations. Additionally, my work with the group has re-inspired me to continue the long, arduous process of flipping a classroom. I have come to realize that not only does the creation of the podcasts take an inordinate amount of time, but the classroom time itself then needs to be re-planned. Before, if I was short on a lesson plan, I could simply lecture on the next item on our agenda, and use that to shrink or expand to fill the necessary time. Now, though, students enter having watched the lecture; no tap dancing is allowed! To truly benefit from the flipped classroom model, I need to ensure that application activities are ready to go each day. That is a challenge, but a most worthwhile challenge nonetheless. Having exposure to the group has reinvigorated me to forge ahead, refine my skills, remain a role model for my peers, and more seamlessly integrate some technological pieces into the progressions I already take.

I am glad I had this study group opportunity. I have learned a large amount in such a short time. I look forward, also, to seeing how my colleagues’ work has changed over the course of this group’s time. I have seen them become more comfortable with the tools we examined, and I have seen the wheels turn a little more toward how these will improve their classroom. For me, that is a completely positive experience. I thank them, too, for getting my own wheels turning. I will remember what I have learned here these few weeks and use it to continue to better myself for the rest of my career.